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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 002374

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SUBJECT: WHAT OUR FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IS REALLY DOING IN
VENEZUELA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM R. BROWNFIELD FOR REASON 1.4 (B) and
(D)

Summary

(C) AMBASSADORQS INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. The latest exchanges with Washington over FY06 foreign assistance reprogramming and FY08 request levels convince me that we have not done a good job explaining our foreign assistance strategy in Venezuela. Simply stated, we are supporting and strengthening a wide range of democratic institutions. The institutions include civil society NGOs, grass roots political participatory organizations, U.S. democracy-building institutions, and local organizations providing basic social services at the community level. Support for these organizations helps keep alive endangered democratic institutions, but also: plants the seeds for stronger institutions in the future; provides an alternative to ChavezQ divisive message; reaches out to sympathetic chavistas; connects with the counterdrug community; engages the private sector and other financial players; lays an infrastructure for other governments to work in; gets our message into the Chavez base communities; and projects the U.S. in a positive light. This message provides some concrete examples of what the strategy has achieved. This is a strategy that is good policy, good politics, good public relations, good public diplomacy, and does not cost much. It is worth supporting. END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION.

12. (C) USAID/OTI began operations in Venezuela in 2002. Its guidance was to help facilitate the implementation of a "peaceful, democratic, constitutional, and electoral" resolution to VenezuelaQs political crisis. The BRV has continued to slide toward authoritarianism, and USAID/OTI has had to adjust its vision to reflect that reality. The vision is, of necessity, medium to long-term. Rebuilding VenezuelaQs dysfunctional democratic system has no easy answers or quick fixes, but the ground-work is being laid.

13. (C) OTIQs target populations continue to be political parties and civil society (primarily NGOs) based on the premise that these two groups are fundamental underpinnings of a healthy democracy. We have no illusions that the extremely limited resources available for this effort can counterbalance - even in a minor way - the billions of dollars that Chavez has at his disposal. What Chavez cannot control or co-opt with all his billions is the Venezuelans' exuberant spirit of independence. Working against Chavez' militaristic vision and hate-filled discourse is the Venezuelans' essentially pacific nature and appreciation of societal harmony (as delusional as that might be). Chavez also cannot control the fact that his revolution is resulting in a slow process of political maturation (in which people are deeply confused as to what they should be doing). He has unleashed forces that will eventually escape his control. Millions have internalized the message that everyone must participate in their own governance. A new generation of social activists wants to get involved but doesn't know how. Venezuelan civil society needs partners like OTI to help build and strengthen the democratic institutions necessary to move the country beyond its deeply flawed past.

14. (C) Some examples of our impact:

Providing Direction and Opportunities

- Many so-called chavistas are actually social activists with no great affinity for Chavez. Give them training or an opportunity to actually do something constructive - such as working with municipal or community councils - and they

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engage as active citizens rather than aligning with the BRV's forces of destruction. As an example of how such training is valued, Ambassador recently met with a group of chavistas who thanked him for the training they had received from an OTI partner organization.

- Most NGOs don't understand the importance of citizen advocacy, nor how it's done. An OTI partner developed training materials for a course in advocacy that ran over 8 weekends in Caracas, with the full participation of 30 of the larger NGOs - and received rave reviews. In the coming months, this course will be offered in 3 regional capitals.

- Chavez continues to loudly define and distort what democracy is all about. To provide some balance - primarily in low-income neighborhoods - OTI has developed five highly inter-active training modules that focus on: rule of law, separation of powers, political tolerance, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the role of civil society. In the two months since this project launched, over 40 NGOs around the country are using the materials to push back on the Bolivarian brain-washing effort.

Highlighting BRV Inefficiency, Incompetence, and Bad Intentions

- The process of bringing people together to work for the benefit of their communities usually highlights the near complete incapacity of the revolution to resolve local problems. A recent project brought together a group of chavistas and non-chavistas to renovate a small park in central Caracas. When the mayor got wind of the project, he shoved the group aside and announced that he would personally take responsibility for the park, and chip in \$230,000. The group moved on to another run-down park which they renovated with \$20,000 of OTI funding and inaugurated in mid-July with extensive media coverage. The first park is still in ruins 6 months later.

- The BRV is signatory to just about every major international treaty that exists - and the constitution covers any ground that was missed. OTI is supporting a number of watchdog organizations to monitor, document, and publicize BRV compliance with these treaties and constitutional guarantees (e.g. access to the justice system, freedom of the press, and the political rights of women). One group, the Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones, regularly infuriates the Minister of Justice with bursts of non-partisan public criticism regarding prison-related issues. This leads to constant unkept promises to fix things and highlights the generalized incompetence of the government.

- Providing training to Venezuelan human rights activists in neighboring countries creates opportunities for building alliances with colleagues in the region and raising awareness regarding BRV assaults on human rights and democracy. After finishing a week-long training in Chile in late July, three Venezuelan human rights activists continued on to Uruguay and Argentina where OTI partner Freedom House had organized numerous meetings with NGOs, local media, and political leaders (including a special session of the Uruguayan national assembly's International Relations Commission). The main topic of discussion was the proposed law to restrict Venezuelan NGOs' right of association and to receive international funding.

- Social impact projects inaugurated by the ambassador serve as a positive contrast to the BRV's constant negative rhetoric regarding the Evil Empire. They also highlight

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the contrast between the vision and the reality of the revolution. The most-repeated observation from partner organizations (e.g. centers for street children, day-care centers and Little League teams in low-income neighborhoods) is that the USG stepped up after the organization spent years unsuccessfully soliciting support from the BRV.

Training the Next Generation of Political Leaders
IRI and NDI continue to work on political party renovation, primarily with young(er) leadership, primarily outside of Caracas. They are also identifying potential future political leaders who are not affiliated with a political party. Those identified will participate in a program to prepare them for a run at local council seats and/or mayorships in 2008. (Note: NDI continues to provide technical assistance to the electoral observation NGO Ojo Electoral. End Note.)

COMMENT

15. (C) Venezuela's institutions have always been deeply flawed and never served the needs of the majority - and the Bolivarian Revolutionaries continue working to destroy or co-opt what remains. The basis for a renovated democratic system has been laid, however, through Chavez's insistence on citizens becoming involved in their own governance (as centralized as that vision might be). USAID/OTI is playing a critical role in moving that process forward through partnership with a group of courageous individuals and organizations. This is a strategy that is good policy, good politics, good public relations, and does not cost much. It is worth supporting.

WHITAKER